A CRITICAL SURVEY OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH POPULAR FICTION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RAVINDER SINGH'S SELECT NOVELS

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Dnyanteerth, Vishnupuri, Nanded - 431 606

Research Scholar

RAJENDRA BABAN KSHIRSAGAR
Assistant Professor in English
Mahatma Phule Nutan Mahavidyalaya
Mirajgaon, Taq. Karjat, Dist. Ahmednagar

Research Supervisor

Dr SYED NISAR KARIM

Head, Dept. of English

Azad Mahavidyalaya, Ausa, Dist. Latur. (M.S.) 413520

Nanded 431 606.

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A] Introduction

The nexus between literature and life is so intimate and vital that literature gains its power and universal appeal by expressing the individual and social realities of life in more truthful ways than the real life itself. The added value of emotions, sensation, suspense, aesthetic pleasure and universal appeal makes it amazing and incredible that renovates common truth into the larger truth in the manifold of literature. West, Jessamyn has rightly affirmed the same thought as, *"Fiction reveals truth that reality obscures."* (Web). Literature, therefore, must be woven out of the stuff of life as its mirror since its value relies on the depth and breadth of life that it paints.

'Popular Fiction' stands exactly in contradiction with the genre 'Literary Fiction' and refers meticulously to the kind of writing that is well known, celebrated in the masses of readers due to its light mode of writing, elegant setting and playful thematic concern. Structurally, it differs, opposes exactly with the genre 'Literary Fiction'. There has been a significant distinction between the two since they serve distinctive purposes. Literary fiction aims to uphold the mirror to the conditions of human life while popular fiction aims to entertain, to please, to thrill and to comfort its readers. This minute disciplinary distinction of the genre makes it extra-ordinary from rest of all the genres of literature.

While opposing the idea of mainstream literary fiction and non-fiction, Ken Gelder offers a lively, progressive and comprehensive account of popular fiction as a distinctive literary practice in recent times. Logically, he discovers a wide range of popular novelists from Sir Walter Scott and Marie Corelli to Ian Fleming and proposes its meritorious status on the canvas of literature. According to him, many proponents of the genre such as J. K. Rowling, Stephen King, John Grisham, Michael Crichton, Anne Rice, Jackie Collins have escalated the worth, the dignity of popular fiction through their noteworthy contribution to the genre. Significantly, it has been difficult to distinguish between the two genres since they are closely associated, allied and coupled in the manifold of the literary canvas. Respectively, literary fiction and popular fiction co-exist in a constant state of mutual repulsion and repudiation, therefore, their classification is unattainable.

Surprisingly, the genre again confuses by its meaning as - 'widely admired and accepted ' since it can confusingly be allied to the writings of major literary authors having a wide range of recognition and popularity. Many of the writers due to their best-selling-features are identified as super-sellers in the market. Indian novelists like Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, have gained worldwide admiration and acceptance. Nevertheless, few writers have an exception to the rule noted above; none of these writers has actually produced popular fiction. At the same time, popular fiction is not an anti-literary genre. It has its own identity, integrity, uniqueness and features as well.

As noted before the prime aim that popular fiction is to serve through its distinctiveness from the mainstream literary fiction. It mediates less significance to the plot of the story where often very little happens but is constructed with big-hearted, bally stories that slip down easily to the comic consort. A huge significance is given to the characters who act like stock figures and the story revolves around them. Linguistically, the care is taken not to waste a single word that creates everyday humour and is closer to real life. It is often filled with witty dialogues, generous kind of language spoken and heard in everyday life. Thematically, the genre explores relevant, appealing, fascinating and interesting themes that too in effective ways. Thus, popular fiction distinguishes from other genres of literature and presents its unique identity in the realm of literature. The research in this area would impart a unique status to the genre as well as the same would bring forth the concrete analysis of Ravinder Singh's selected novels.

Ravinder Singh has been celebrated as the king of popular fiction since he has written several novels in the fashion of popular fiction. He is a software engineer from Odisha and a rising star in Indian English novel writing. He began his career as a creative writer with the first novel giving a truthful account of his own love story as *I Too Had A Love Story* (2007). Till the date he has published several novels in the same fashion as *Can Love Happen Twice* (2011), *Your Dreams are Mine Now* (2014), *Love Stories That Touched My Heart* (2012), *This Love that Feels Right* (2016), etc. Most of his novels deal with love, fortune, romance, rejection, dejection, relationship, science, crime, beloved's memories, deaths, that fills thrills, suspense, crimes in the readers. Since, in a short span of time, he has been recognized worldwide, the present research undertakes first three novels for the careful study and examination to trace out perspectives, techniques and themes of popular fiction in them.

The present research deliberately undertakes a vigilant study of Ravinder Singh's selected novels *I Too Had A Love Story* (2008), *Can Love Happen Twice* (20111), and *Your Dreams are Mine Now* (2014). The research is meticulously designed to revolve around delineation, exploration of several thematic concerns, narrative techniques, form and content in the selected novels. It would also simplify the ongoing confusion of delineating popular fiction by exploring several petals of popular fiction that distinguishes it from other forms of mainstream literary genres.

B] Literature Review

Thesis Statement: **A Critical Survey of Contemporary Indian English Popular Fiction with Special Reference to Ravinder Singh's Select Novels**

Earlier studies in the field of 'popular fiction' have identified the origin, and status of popular fiction as the genre, a kind of literature which serves to and serves the pure entertainment, amusement of its readers with moral sense and purpose. Much has been done in this genre till the day and yet there is a lot to be explored and discovered about. Ken, Gelder's *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of Literary Field* (2004) has discovered, validated and explored a firm ground for the development of the genre. Whereas, his *New Directions in Popular Fiction: Genre, Distribution, Reproduction I* (2016) has postulated the genre, its kinds, and multiple layers embodied in the kind of literature. Several writers such as Christine, Berberich (2015), David Glover and Scott McCracken, (2012) and M. Moovendhan, (2015) have enhanced their intellectual scholarship chiefly in concern to Popular Fiction and Ravinder Singh's contribution to the genre. As stated before, the thesis statement aims at an in-depth study of the genre and critical analysis of Ravinder Singh's selected novels, the research would, ultimately, contribute to the field of literature. It would integrate the all possible conclusions of popular fiction by linking it to the earlier studies and finding in the area. Hence, it would bring additional benefits by highlighting the importance of the genre, and the status of Ravinder Singh as a prominent writer in the genre. The same would, as well, impart a new authentic identity to the form and content that is written and conveyed in the kind of literature. Hence, academically, the thesis statement has much value, and implications to serve for.

C] Objective (s) of Research

The prime objective of this research is to foster on the 'popular fiction' as a genre and to explore, exemplify the same through the selected novels of Ravinder Singh. The research aims to review the historical account of popular fiction for its origin, developmental course and prominent contributors to the field. In order to provide the concrete formulation to the theoretical disposition of popular fiction, the research aims at critical analysis of the theory as well as selected novels and to verify, validate its outcomes by pervasive standards of the genre. So as to achieve its objective the research would undertake a meticulous analysis of Ravinder Singh's three selected novels *I Too Had A Love Story* (2008), *Can Love Happen Twice* (20111) and *Your Dreams are Mine Now* (2014) and mediate upon several thematic as well as structural entities. Simultaneously, the research aims to study narrative techniques, the distinctiveness of the genre and major voices in the text. In short, it endeavors a comprehensive study of the selected novels of the author.

D] Hypothesis

The research in the select area of 'popular fiction' would delineate a separate identity, uniqueness to the genre 'popular fiction' as a novel form of writing novels. It would bring forth several themes of contemporary Indian English Popular Fictional life such as love, romance, thrill, entertainment, rejection, dejection, divorce, excitement, amusement, horror, wit and so on. Concurrently, the research would explore the historical development of the genre and widely it would bring worth to the genre in the literary field. The search would be an in-depth study of popular fiction to establish, verify and validate popular fiction against the backdrop of mainstream literary fiction. Exclusive insight into the realm of popular fiction would also simplify the theoretical ground for the genre where intellectuals, scholars and literary scholars would develop their texts.

E] Data, Scope and Limitation (s)

The present research chiefly relies on the availability of the study material in the library, on the web and through all other possible resources. Furthermore, it relies on the findings of distinctive elements, narrative techniques of popular fiction in the selected novels of Ravinder

Singh. However, it would be a limited study of selected works of the author. In the due course, if it necessitates, the research would be flexible to include more texts having similar concerns, appeal and context by the same author. Nevertheless, there would be a greater opportunity to include several thematic concerns as per the openness and findings in the selected novels aforementioned in the introduction itself.

F] Research Methodology

The present research would utilize analytical and descriptive research methodology so as to access the distinctiveness of 'popular fiction' as a genre in the selected works of Ravinder Singh. Initially, it would analyze the presence of several themes, techniques, form and content of popular fiction in the selected works of the author. Further, it would be descriptive while delineating and formulating its textual entity in the form of a thesis. The research necessitates an extensive reading, analysis of primary and secondary resources for its investigation of selected perspectives and themes. Eventually, it would attempt a comparative, proportional study, analysis of characters, themes, narrative techniques, structural entities explored in the selected text. Ultimately, it would establish, verify and validate its hypothetical assumptions by formulating a concrete conclusion to the subject undertaken. In order to derive its formative conclusion, the research would engage library methodology as per the availability of information on the topic.

G] Justification of Research

Indeed, the research in the area of 'popular fiction' would bring greater interests and benefits to the students, knowledge seekers, researchers and trainees in the field of literature and aspirants of 'popular fiction.' The same walk around innumerable thematic perspectives of popular fiction through its apt interpretation, explanation and comparative analysis. The research would be beneficial to the students of literature to build their comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the genre popular fiction. It would bring greater benefits to the writers having interest in popular fiction.

H] Pedagogical Implications (if any)

The research in this area would delineate a formative, influential understanding of popular fiction as a unique, novel and separate genre having wide popularity, recognition and acknowledgement from its readership. It would reveal a new platform for creative writing and for the aspirants in the academia by illuminating popular fiction as distinguished from the mainstream literary fiction that too having wide acceptance and fame. Since limited research has been done in the genre, there is much to be done to delineate, explore and reveal about the popular fiction. Moreover, the research would also postulate a comprehensive outlook of Ravinder Singh's selected novels. Academically, the research would engage and bring greater benefits to each concerned once to the field. Thus, it would be helpful to the students, researchers and critics as well. Those who are seeking their interest to understand 'popular fiction as the genre' would get benefited highly through the research.

I] Tentative Chapter Scheme

The present research is meticulously planned and is classified into five chapters just to make it convenient to understand the entire outline of the study. The first chapter provides a theoretical disposition of the genre popular fiction whereas further three chapters undertake a careful analysis of selected novels of Ravinder Singh. The concluding segment principally deals with formative conclusions and findings of the research.

1] Introduction: Exploring Indian English Popular Fiction

The very first chapter would deal with the preliminary exploration, the origin of the genre popular fiction in order to give it a unique identity and recognition. The chapter would endeavour to trace out a distinctive line between the mainstream literary fiction and Indian Popular Fiction by finding similarities and differences between the two. It would undertake a special insight to impart a comprehensive picture of the genre against the backdrop of mainstream literary fiction. Also, it would delineate, postulate and validate the distinctive definitions of the genre. Simultaneously, the chapter would have a brief survey of contemporary Indian English Popular Fiction writers, major contributors to the genre by a comparative analysis of distinctive writers.

As popular fiction, magnificently, explores on several themes of love, romance, crime, relationship, horror, rejection and dejection, divorce, tradition versus modernity, thrill, mythology, etc. the chapter would endeavour to imply all these perspectives implicitly embodied in the construction of Ravinder Singh's selected novels. The segment would meditate on the thematic concern of popular fiction, narrative techniques used in its construction, the form and content. It intends to explain how Ravinder Singh differs in his treatment to the subject matter from his all predecessors since he has received global recognition. It would also discuss the place of Ravinder Singh amongst the prominent contributors to the genre.

2] A Study of *I Too Had A Love Story* as a popular Fiction

Ravinder Singh's *I Too Had A Love Story* (2008) mediates autobiographical elements in it and deals with the theme of true love that ultimately becomes immortal. The novel reveals the love story of Ravin and Khushi who happens to meet on the matrimonial website and dream to get marries, but ultimately their love ends with the death of Khushi just before the three days of their engagement. It reveals several themes such as love, romance, relationship, the uncertainty of life, death, momentary life, tradition versus modernity and anxiety of lovers. Those for whom love is the most beautiful feelings beyond human comprehensions and constraint the story brings an ever cherished experience. Surprisingly, it is dramatic fiction because it breaks the conventional setting, "*they lived happily ever after"* by introducing twist with the sudden, unexpected death of the heroine Khushi and yet becomes immortal. Moreover, it has some autobiographical elements that make a sentimental appeal to its readers as well. The novel brings forth tears, laughter, pain and gains, sufferings and smiles of the true lovers.

Too Had A Love Story postulates a perfect synergy of true love, funny elements, excitement, curiosity, lovely apprehensions, feelings and emotions with action. It has some slighter humour with witty denotations. Just with the innate beauty of their love story, the novel expresses subtle emotions in the most simple and lucid ways that make it noteworthy. The novel deals with the fact that not everyone in this world has the fate to cherish the fullest form of love, some are born, just to experience the abbreviation of it. The present research would undertake a careful analysis, examination of the novel to explore patterns of popular fiction in the same.

Moreover, it would trace out narrative techniques, settings, and several attributes of popular fiction that makes it immortal in the eyes of its readers.

3] A Study of *Can Love Happen Twice* as a popular fiction

Can Love Happen Twice (2011) is written as a sequel of the previous novel *I Too Had A Love Story* that continues the story of Ravin and Khushi. In the due course, Ravin happens to meet another girl Simar who is a symbolic figure of Khushi. The novel opens with the sense of loss and agony for Khushi's sudden death and is filled with emotional fall of the hero Ravin. Unbelievably, Ravin again falls in love with Simar but eventually, Simar as well leaves him on the very same day he had lost his first love Khushi. His longing for true love ends with disappointment and despair only. The sufferings in the pangs of memories of beloved, detachment and dejection fill the entire story with sentimental clamour. In short, unfulfilled love, desires, agony, memories, dejection and sense of loss fills the entire sentimentalism in the novel. The novel best serves the purpose to increase the curiosity of readers to *"What happened to Ravin after the sad demise of his first love Khushi?"*

The novel postulates an excellent blend of love, friendship, compromise, romance, happiness and sadness in a perfect synergy of *Can Love Happens Twice*. Ravinder Singh uses simple language with the slightest touch of humour in best possible words that suit characters. The author successfully touches the rampant issues of break-ups, divorce, man-woman relationship, frustration, the excitement that obsesses our generations. The present research would postulate numerous themes, narrative techniques in the novel that are evidently seen in the contemporary scenario, further it would undertake a comprehensive study of the novel for its entire clamour of love and loss, gain and pains against the romantic flair.

4] A Study of *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* as a popular fiction

Your Dreams are Mine Now (2014) is another heartwarming love story of a Delhi boy, Arjun and small-town girl Rupali studying at Delhi University. The love between Arjun and Rupali is tested against the evil fire of university politics that seems to be a fictional tale and draws inspiration from a real-life incident of *Nirbhaya Rape Case* at Delhi. Rupali is shown to be

the young innocent girl from Patna having dreams of getting into college education. Rupali is a simple girl having lovely sour with an intelligent, beautiful, smart, unfashionable lifestyle. She has nothing but her simplicity to forecast as a philosophy of life. In contradiction to this, Arjun is shown to be a leader at Delhi University having high aspirations, leadership qualities and rebellious nature to his fate.

Arjun and Rupali stand for opposite poles. During the course, they fall in love with each other and their life gets complicated with socio-political complexities of life. The novel explores core themes such as love, romance, agony, hatred, conspiracies, gain and pains in love that obstructs ultimately the man-woman relationship in the novel. This segment of this research would have careful analysis of significant issues that are portrayed, handled deliberately to denote the truthful account of contemporary Indian life at Delhi University. Comparatively enough, the segment would trace out distinctive elements of popular fiction that enrich the beauty and decorum of this novel and appeals a wide recognition.

4] Conclusion

The conducing segment of the research would comparatively analyze, examine and explore all the elements and attributes of popular fiction in the selected works of Ravinder Singh. It would compare several themes, aspects and perspectives explored during the developmental course of this research. Seemingly, it would mediate, establish, verify, validate several themes such as love, romance, happiness, rejection, dejection, hatred, anxiety, humour, excitement, relationship, thrill, horror, crime, representation reflected through selected novels *I Too Had A Love Story*, *Can Love Happen Twice* and *Your Dreams are Mine Now*. The deliberate insight into thematic and structural fabrication of these novels would validate a firm foreground for the formulation of concrete conclusions about popular fiction. Not only it would delineate the genre but would recognize its wide recognition, popularity and familiarity. Eventually, the research would prove Ravinder Singh’s unparalleled status in the field of popular fiction. Ultimately, it would be a comprehensive study of Ravinder Singh's style and fashion of writing that well addresses the true nature, scope and extent of popular fiction as a separate entity.

J] Abstract of Research Topic

Popular fiction has been a very significant branch of literature. Much has been done and much is to be done in the field while delineating socio-cultural realities in the form of lighter text than the literary fiction. At the same time, it is very difficult to define the genre as it is reflexive of popular culture in its manifold. While dealing with the truth and versions of truth that are reflected through literary and popular fiction both Tim O'Brien has rightly asserted, *"That's what fiction is for. It's for getting at the truth when the truth isn't sufficient for the truth"*. (Web) There has been a difficulty in defining the genre and a clear distinction between the culture and popular culture. At times, most of the novelists have blurred the disciplinary margins by transgressing into the realm of each other's genres. Novelists from both genres have constructed textual entities by crossing literary fictional and popular fictional boundaries. The same has complicated the nature and scope of popular fiction.

The present research would incorporate the theory of popular fiction in the light of perspectives of some prominent critics such as Ken Gelder, Thomas Roberts and Victor Neuburg. There exclusive insight into the realms of popular fiction, popular culture, and popular practices has explored the intricacies of the genre to its fullest possible extent. Rather they have portrayed the comprehensive outlook of the genre and have simplified the difficulty in defining the genre. Though the genre was being ignored for a long, it has its own identity and significance against the backdrop of literary fiction.

The transitional phase of culture, morality, industrialization and commercialization has brought greater benefits to the genre since it has shown the mirror to the changing societies with the technological waves. Many critics, scholars and authors have postulated greater realities in the form of popular fiction. They have dealt with numerous perspectives such as love, romance, rejection, dejection, hatred, horror, representations. In fact, they have dealt with changing themes, issues of the society with greater significance and wide recognition. Ken Gelder in his book *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* has imparted the entire clamour in defining the origin, nature, features and scope of the genre.

David Foster Wallace has simplified the nature of popular fiction by delineating the purpose of good fiction as, *"Good fiction's job is to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable."* Likewise, Thomas Robert as well has given high reverence to popular fiction in his book *An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction.* He has clarified the distinctive line between 'Popular Fiction' and 'Popular Literature' as - Popular Literature celebrates the 'high recognition' and 'wide acceptance, favour' from its readers, whereas Popular Fiction can be the novel form of writing that signifies the kind of a genre of literature. In fact, both the forms of writing have an exclusive purpose to serve and have appeal to their readership. Eventually, both to contribute to the field of literature. Hence, the distinction between the two becomes insignificant. Yet, popular fiction celebrates its unique place and status in Indian English literature. John Cheever has delineated the only purpose to the fiction as, *"Fiction is art and art is the triumph over chaos... to celebrate a world that lies spread out around us like a bewildering and stupendous dream."*

The genre has been contributed by numerous literary works such as *Silent Scream* (2015) and *Picture Perfect* (2002) by La Plante, *New Maps of Hell* (1960), *Take A Chance on Me* (2016) by Jill Mansell, etc. Many authors like Chetan Bhagat and Barbara Cartland have explored their unmeritorious intellect in the field. Hence only, the genre has received wide popularity and fame during a short time. The present research endeavours to understand, explore and validate entirely the writings of Ravinder Singh through his selected novels *I Too Had A Love Story, Can Love Happens Twice* and *Your Dreams Are Mine Now.* The research would make it clear what really appeals to the readers in popular fiction. Simultaneously it would explore the distinctive line between popular fiction and Indian Popular fiction as well.

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